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Sanctuary Ocean Count marks 20th anniversary
Volunteers count whales across Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

More than 600 volunteers gathered data from the shores of O‘ahu, Kaua‘i and Hawai‘i islands during the final event of the 20th Anniversary Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Ocean Count.

The count is conducted three times per year during peak whale season and is a shore-based census that provides snapshot data on humpback whales. Participants tally humpback whale sightings and document the animals’ surface behavior during the survey.

Volunteers collected data from 57 sites statewide. A total of 160 whales were seen during the 09:30 a.m. to 09:45 a.m. time period, the most of any time period throughout today’s count. Interestingly enough, the sites that reported the highest average number of humpback whales were predominantly located within sanctuary boundaries.

Varying weather conditions made for a unique experience at each of the project sites. Many Kaua‘i volunteers enjoyed calm weather and clear visibility. Several O‘ahu and Hawai‘i islands sites were faced with rough seas, white caps, and passing squalls. Rain or shine, the project’s trained volunteers exhibited admirable commitment and diligence in carrying out their data collection duties, while enjoying humpback whales

“For 20 years, the Sanctuary Ocean Count has proven to be a fun volunteer activity for residents and visitors,” said Malia Chow, sanctuary superintendent. “It also provides important population and distribution information on humpback whales around the Hawaiian Islands that we use to better understand and protect this important species.”

Preliminary data detailing whale sightings by site location is available at:
<http://www.sanctuaryoceancount.org/resources/>

The Sanctuary Ocean Count is held each year on the last Saturday of January, February, and March. Interested volunteers may register online at <http://sanctuaryoceancount.org>. Additional information is available on the sanctuary’s website at <http://hawaiiumpbackwhale.noaa.gov> or volunteers may call 808-725-5917 (O‘ahu, and Hawai‘i) and 808-246-2860 for Kaua‘i. Volunteers are required to register prior to participating. Registration closes one week prior to the event date.

The sanctuary which is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources, protects humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaiian waters where they migrate each winter to mate, calve and nurse their young.

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On the Web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary:

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

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